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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7160
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

BUENOS AIRES 6099

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SHUM, AR, VT
SUBJECT: NUNCIO'S VIEWS ON SITUATION IN ARGENTINA

REF (A) BUENOS AIRES 6020, (B) BUENOS AIRES 5684

1. I CALLED ON PAPAL NUNCIO YESTERDAY MORNING (SEPT 16) TO
PAY MY RESPECTS AFTER RETURN TO POST AND TO EXCHANGE VIEWS
WITH HIM ON SITUATION IN ARGENTINA.

2. THE NUNCIO SAID HE WAS CONCERNED OVER THE WAY THE
SITUATION WAS DEVELOPING HERE. THE CHURCH HERE HAS PLAYED
A VERY MODERATE AND RESPONSIBLE ROLE, BUT UNLESS THE GOVT
MAKES RECTIFICATIONS SOON, IT WILL FIND ITSELF IN HEAD-ON
CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHURCH. HE SAID HE FELT THE SITUATION
WOULD BREAK ONE WAY OR THE OTHER WITHIN NEXT TWO WEEKS. THE
NUNCIO INFORMED ME THAT THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ARGENTINE
EPISCOPATE--BISHOPS ARAMBURU, ZAZPE AND PRIMATESTA--HAD LUNCHE
WITH THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE JUNTA THE DAY BEFORE AND HAD
AREAS IN WHICH THE CHURCH BELIEVES CORRECTIVE ACTION MUST
BE TAKEN BY THE GOVT. THE NUNCIO DID NOT ENUMERATE ALL THE
POINTS BUT SAID OBVIOUSLY THE MOST IMPORTANT HAD TO DO WITH
HUMAN RIGHTS. IF ELEMENTS OF THE SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE TO
MURDER AND KIDNAP CITIZENS VIRTUALLY IN PUBLIC, THE CHURCH
WILL HAVE NO RECOURSE BUT TO TAKE A VERY STRONG STAND AGAINST

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THE GOVT ITSELF. THE NUNCIO SAID ANOTHER OF THE POINTS IN THE DOCUMENT CALLED ON THE GOVT TO STOP INTERFERING IN MATTERS WHICH WERE CLEARLY WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF THE CHURCH. BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION, HE MENTIONED THAT SOME GENERALS SEEMED TO BELIEVE THEY SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO CENSOR SERMONS BEFORE THEY ARE DELIVERED.

3. NUNCIO SAID THE BISHOPS IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS WITH THE JUNTA AND HE IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH GENERALS VIOLA AND VIDELA HAVE STRESSED TO THE GOVT THAT THE CHURCH IS WELL INFORMED AS TO WHAT IS GOING ON. HE POINTED OUT FIRST OF ALL THAT THE 6,000 PRIESTS AND NUNS IN ARGENTINA ARE IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE PEOPLE AND HAVE A GOOD FEEL FOR POPULAR REACTION. FURTHER, HE NOTED, THE MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY COME TO PRIESTS FOR SPIRITUAL SOLACE AND GUIDANCE. LEAVING ASIDE WHAT IS SAID IN CONFESSION WHICH IS SACROSANCT, THE NUNCIO SAID, "ENOUGH MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE COME TO US TO TELL US THAT THEY CANNOT SLEEP AT NIGHT BECAUSE OF THE ACTS OF TORTURE DURING THE DAY SO THAT WE HAVE A VERY CLEAR IDEA AS TO HOW DEEPLY INVOLVED THE MILITARY IS IN VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS."

4. NUNCIO SAID THAT UNFORTUNATELY THERE ARE SOME MILITARY OFFICERS WHO ARE SIMPLY BLIND TO THE REALITIES OF LIFE. THEY HAVE A VERY SIMPLISTIC IDEA OF WHAT SOCIETY SHOULD BE AND AS TO A CITIZEN'S DUTIES WITHIN IT. ANYONE WHO DOES NOT AGREE WITH THEM IS SIMPLY LABELED A "DANGEROUS LEFTIST" AND IS FAIR GAME FOR ELIMINATION. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE, THE NUNCIO FELT, AMONG THE CAPTAINS AND MAJORS.

5. IN ADDITION TO HUMAN RIGHTS, THE NUNCIO SAID HE WAS EXTREMELY CONCERNED OVER VOLATILE LABOR SITUATION. HE SAID THAT HERE AGAIN THE GOVT SIMPLY DID NOT APPEAR TO HAVE A VERY REALISTIC VIEW. THEY FELT THE WORKINGMAN WOULD ACCEPT THE SQUEEZE WITHOUT A MURMUR, BUT THAT IS PROBABLY NOT THE CASE. NUNCIO SAID HE FEARED A LABOR EXPLOSION UNLESS THE GOVT TAKES SOME STEPS TO MUTE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM ON THE WORKINGMAN.

6. THE NUNCIO FELT GOVT'S HANDLING OF MRS. PERON AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT HER HAD ALSO BEEN UNFORTUNATE. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER ADVISED, HE FELT, TO EXPEL HER FROM THE COUNTRY

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QUICKLY. HAD THEY DONE SO SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN QUICKLY FORGOTTEN FOR AT THE TIME OF THE COUP HER POPULARITY HAD DROPPED TO ZERO. AS IT IS, HOWEVER, HER SIX MONTHS UNDER HOUSE ARREST WITHOUT ANY STARTLING NEW CHARGES BEING PRESSED AGAINST HER, DESPITE GOVT'S EARLIER INDICATIONS OF MASSIVE EVIDENCE OF WRONGDOING AGAINST HER, ARE HAVING EFFECT OF REVIVING SOME SENTIMENT FOR HER, ESPECIALLY AMONG WORKINGCLASS WHICH WERE SUFFERING THE BRUNT OF THE GOVT'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM.

7. IN CONCLUSION, THE NUNCIO SAID THAT DESPITE THE RATHER NEGATIVE PICTURE PAINTED ABOVE, HE WAS REASONABLY OPTIMISTIC AS TO THE FUTURE. HE SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT VIOLA AND VIDELA WERE GOOD MEN AND WISHED TO CORRECT THE ABUSES OF THE SECURITY FORCES AND BRING ORDER TO THE GOVT. FURTHER, THE NUNCIO SAID, HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT VIDELA'S POSITION HAD STRENGTHENED SOMEWHAT RECENTLY AND THEREFORE THAT THERE WAS MORE HOPE NOW THAN IN THE PAST THAT VIDELA WOULD BE ABLE TO IMPOSE HIS OWN MODERATE VIEWS OVER THOSE OF THE HARDLINERS. HILL

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